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AUTHOR	Jensen, Victoria; Wenzel, Alan
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of an outcomes assessment project called Capstone at Highland Community College (Illinois). Highland Community College needed an assessment for outcomes and competencies not measurable with a standardized test or a survey. The college created a seminar-like course, Capstone, which would provide faculty with an opportunity to observe the extent to which students would demonstrate or apply general education skills, such as the ability to discuss issues with peers, make independent decisions, and design, communicate and evaluate an individual and a collaborative project. The college developed and articulated a two-credit, eight-week, tuition-free course, which required students to complete four projects: two in response to prompts; a personal portfolio; and a career project. It also required at least one oral presentation, one written presentation, one team project, one individual project, and one project including numerical support. The course asked students to develop and use rubrics to critique their own work and that of classmates. The students could work on teams to reach shared goals, make independent decisions, and make oral presentations. But they had difficulty discussing issues in depth, tended to focus on detail without establishing a thesis, and demonstrated lack of sophistication in selecting and citing sources. (JA)

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ED 452 906

Creating a Sophomore Capstone Experience in the Community College

Victoria Jensen
Alan Wenzel

Introduction

Highland Community College began its assessment of student learning with the general education component of its degree programs in 1995. Faculty identified six general education outcomes and worked in committees to develop competencies for each outcome. Competencies were identified as cognitive or affective. The guiding principle behind the development of the outcomes and competencies was the search for a true characterization of the successful student at the completion of his or her Highland education. Discussion of assessment methods and instruments was postponed until the outcomes and competencies were completed.

In the fall of 1997 the college implemented a standardized assessment of general education, the College Outcome Measures Program (COMP) from ACT. A committee of faculty developed an additional survey to assess the values and beliefs included in the general education outcomes and competencies. Each of these measures was designed to be administered as both a pre-assessment for incoming freshmen and a post-assessment for sophomore students completing their general education core courses.

It became increasingly clear that assessment of a significant proportion of the outcomes and competencies could not be accomplished by a standardized instrument or a survey. After much discussion and consultation, the college's Assessment Committee committed to the creation of a sophomore Capstone course.

The Project

A group of faculty and administrators was formed to begin general discussion of the shape and content of the course. The initial concept was to observe students in a seminar-like context as they identified issues, discussed them in some depth, researched additional information, and finally produced individual projects which synthesized ideas and information in quality oral and written presentations. The Capstone nature of the course would be the opportunity for students, as they pursued the development and completion of their projects, to bring together and apply the knowledge and skills learned across their general education curriculum. This would be the capstone of their community college education and also a foundation for their transition to the world of work or to a baccalaureate-granting institution. As the concept began to take shape, the general education outcomes and competencies applicable to the Capstone course were listed and became a guiding influence in the development of course content.

As discussion continued, important issues became evident.

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The Issues

- The Dual Purpose of the Course The primary purpose for the course was to contribute to the assessment of student learning in the general education core curriculum of the college. However, there was great concern that the experience should have direct benefit for the students as well. Meeting each of these needs in a coherent and reliable manner became a challenge as the course was created.
- The Construction of the Course Issues of credit, grades, and articulation and transfer needed to be determined in the context of the dual purpose for the course. Although no direct instruction was to occur, it was assumed that learning would indeed occur as students worked to meet the requirements.
- The Role of the Instructor Since the course was to provide evidence of student learning, or conversely evidence that students had not learned the desired knowledge and skills, the role of the instructor needed to be defined and limited. Lengthy discussion occurred about the line between instructing, and thus developing in the students new knowledge and skills, and providing a catalyst which would allow objective observation of learning that had occurred.
- Evaluation of the Projects Initially it was believed that students should pass the course regardless of performance since little instruction would occur. Additional concerns centered on the extent of instructor feedback to students as each project was completed.
- The Significance of the Results The student population for the course would be small and the data collected would be instructor observations and evaluations. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the results would establish a valid basis for a campus-wide discussion of improvements in the college's curriculum.

The Capstone Course

Highland Community College offered an 8-week 2-credit Capstone Course spring semester 1999 to fourth semester full-time students who had completed approximately ¾ of their general education requirements with courses from across the curriculum. The course was tuition-free, and upon completion students received a cash stipend from a privately-donated scholarship fund. Three sections limited to 12 students were facilitated by two instructors each. The course was successfully articulated with the requisite three Illinois universities and therefore qualified as elective credit toward a Highland degree.

Students were informed of the dual purpose of the course during recruitment. The importance of the students' role in assessment was presented to them as well as the opportunity to synthesize and apply their general education knowledge and skills prior to transition. Included in the course as required projects were a career unit and a personal

portfolio which would directly benefit the individual students as they pursued employment or transfer.

The syllabus reflected the outcomes and competencies to be evaluated as students completed four projects. The students were to demonstrate the extent to which they could engage in informed discussion of personal, professional, social and global issues; gather, analyze, and synthesize data; make effective oral and written presentations; work in collaborative groups; and critique and evaluate their work and that of others.

A series of rubrics was developed to assist instructors in the evaluation of the projects, and students were required to develop their own rubrics for critiquing projects. Letter grades would be awarded as projects exceeded expectations, met expectations, or failed to meet expectations.

Instructor packets included a clarification of the instructor role: to involve the students in a series of activities which would require them to demonstrate specific general education outcomes and competencies. The instructor was expected to motivate and inspire students to engage enthusiastically in the assigned work, to answer specific questions, to observe classroom action and keep a log of observations, to evaluate student work according to the rubrics, to mentor and collaborate rather than instruct, and to monitor the group processes and make changes if necessary.

Instructors for the course agreed that those observations which were consistent across sections and for all students and all projects would be sufficiently valid for faculty discussion leading to change in the general education curriculum. It was not deemed critical that the Capstone experience was unique and not linked directly to a pre-assessment or specific courses or methodology in the curriculum. The contribution to the assessment initiative was not to determine value-added during the Highland experience but rather to assess student abilities upon exit from the institution.

Results

The six instructors for the course included three tenured faculty members, one each from natural science, fine arts, and speech/communication. Three administrators, including two academic deans, completed the team. Three of the instructors also serve on the Assessment Committee.

The instructors reported their conclusions to the administration and faculty. They found the students able to make independent decisions and able to make quality oral presentations. They were strong group members, able to organize to reach shared goals and be respectful and inclusive with other group members. Finally, their ability to design and communicate individual and collaborative projects was acceptable.

However, students did not demonstrate strong research skills, strong writing skills, an ability to select and integrate numerical data, or an understanding of critique as a means to evaluate and improve their work.

Faculty were asked to compare the conclusions reached by the Capstone instructors to their experiences with their own students and to discuss needed additions to the delivery of the general education curriculum. The faculty response was nearly unanimous, concurring with the conclusions from the Capstone assessment. They have begun to pursue several campus-wide initiatives to address the noted weaknesses in student performance.

Finally, the students who completed the course were asked to evaluate its structure and its value to them. They were generally enthusiastic about the experience and several of their recommendations have been incorporated into the course scheduled for spring semester 2000. The instructors for the course also provided a list of recommended changes in the delivery of the course. However, the basic concept and format for the Capstone experience has been judged successful and will continue to play a role in the assessment of student learning at Highland Community College.

Conclusion

Highland Community College's Assessment Committee committed to academic assessment as it "provides a formal structure/catalyst for campus-wide dialogue and discussion of student learning and instructional excellence." The Capstone Experience and the resulting observations have met that end. Faculty have embraced the challenge and have begun a healthy, constructive process to strengthen the curriculum. The Capstone Experience will continue to play an important role in assessment as changes are made to the general education curriculum. Additionally it will continue to provide a unique educational experience for community college students to synthesize and apply their general education knowledge and skills prior to transition.

Victoria Jensen is Dean of the Learning Assistance Center at Highland Community College.

Alan Wenzel is a professor of Speech/Communication at Highland Community College.

Capstone Course 1999

Transforming Teaching and Learning

Highland Community College

815 - 235- 6121 www.highland.cc.il.us

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Highland Community College's General Education Outcomes and Competencies

Student Recruitment Letter

Course Syllabus LIB 299 Capstone

What's a Project?

Collaboration

Assessment Committee

- Faculty and Administration
- Conferred with North Central Association, American College Testing (ACT)
- Elected Capstone option as final component for Assessment of General Education

Brainstorming Group

- Members of Assessment Committee and part-time coordinator of College Success Skills
- Developed general format for the course and suggested prompts

Instructional Staff

- Tenured faculty and administration
- Implemented the course
- Reviewed and refined the delivery of the course

Why and What

Highland Community College

- Began assessment with general education outcomes and competencies
- Needed an assessment for outcomes and competencies not measurable with a standardized test or a survey
- Created a seminar-like course, "Capstone," which would provide faculty with an opportunity to observe the extent to which students would demonstrate or apply general education skills, such as the ability

  to discuss issues with peers--professional, social, and global

  to make independent decisions

  to develop strategies to deal with issues of transfer and career

  to design, communicate and evaluate an individual project

  to design, communicate and evaluate a collaborative project

  to gather and use data

  to make an oral presentation

  to be punctual

  to be self-disciplined

  to have a good work ethic

  to be fair

  to work on a team to reach shared goals

  to critique his/her own work and make revisions

  to use numerical information in tables and graphs

How

- developed and articulated a two-credit, eight-week, tuition-free course LIBS 299 Capstone

- scheduled three sections with two instructors each

- created an instructor packet

- promoted the course to a student cohort

- established a monetary "scholarship" reward for completers

- promoted the course within the institution

  presentations at meetings

  advisor packet

- held weekly meetings during the eight-week course with the instructors to discuss implementation strategies and share observations

- continued weekly meetings to reach consensus and prepare Capstone report

The Course

- Used a scene from the movie *Apollo 13* as a practice project.
- Required students to complete four projects

  Two in response to "prompts," a film *The Cost of Free Speech* and a short novel *Night* by Elie Wiesel

  a personal portfolio

  a career project

- Required at least one oral presentation, one written presentation, one team project, one individual project, one project including numerical support
- Asked students to develop and use rubrics to critique their own work and that of classmates
- Involved students in a critique of the course

The Results

Our students could

make independent decisions

make oral presentations

work on teams to reach shared goals; demonstrate respect for team members

design and communicate individual and collaborative projects

However, our students also

had difficulty discussing issues in depth

tended to focus on detail without establishing a thesis

demonstrated a significant lack of sophistication in selecting and citing sources

accepted "first draft" quality in written work

used numerical information in a simplistic and minimal manner

did not distinguish between critiquing and criticizing

Contact Information

Vicki Jensen, Dean, Learning Assistance Center

Highland Community College

2998 West Pearl City Road

Freeport, IL 61032

(815) 235-6121, ext. 3531

Fax: (815) 235-6130

vjensen@admin.highland.cc.il.us

GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES & COMPETENCIES

Academic Outcome Area: Communication

Demonstrate the skills needed to produce and interpret written and oral communication.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. identify main ideas, facts, and opinions from texts or oral presentations.
2. follow written and oral instructions.
3. transmit information and opinions in writing using correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation and appropriate organization and style.
4. make oral presentations using correct pronunciation and grammar and appropriate organization and style.
5. critique their own written and oral presentations and make revisions to improve them.
6. communicate effectively using rhetorical patterns appropriate to the student's discipline.

Academic Outcome Area: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Demonstrate the thinking skills needed to interpret, analyze, and evaluate qualitative and quantitative information.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. analyze and evaluate evidence in order to make inferences and generate conclusions.
2. identify, apply, and evaluate problem solving techniques in a variety of situations.
3. perform basic arithmetic operations (+, -, x, ÷) and apply them to fractions, decimals, and percentages in real applications.
4. use numerical information to construct mathematical models such as tables and graphs.
5. interpret and draw inferences from mathematical models such as formulas, tables, and graphs.

Academic Outcome Area: Awareness and Application of Technology

Demonstrate the skills needed to function in society as technology changes.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. select and apply the appropriate procedures, tools, and other technologies to complete a task.
2. gather, analyze, and synthesize data using information systems (people, computer hardware, software, data, and procedures).
3. demonstrate a willingness to find and use procedures, tools, and technologies effectively.
4. identify the capabilities and limitations of procedures, tools, and technologies.

Academic Outcome Area: Academic and Occupational Success

Demonstrate the skills and attitudes needed by individuals for success in college and on the job.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. demonstrate industry, punctuality, self-discipline, and fairness and explain how these personal characteristics lead to personal and professional success.
2. identify skills and attitudes needed for professional success such as use of safety procedures, attention to detail, treating customers and co-workers with respect and working in a team to define and reach shared goals.
3. demonstrate a willingness to apply effective interpersonal and intergroup behaviors.
4. identify the benefits of education and a situation in which they might need to further their education.

Academic Outcome Area: Decision-Making and Responsibility

Demonstrate the skills and attitudes needed by a person to interact with others successfully and contribute to society.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. discriminate between ethical and unethical conduct.
2. identify the consequences of personal decisions and actions.
3. demonstrate a willingness to apply ethical standards to personal decisions and actions.
4. appreciate social and political diversity.
5. show concern for the welfare and rights of others.
6. accept that there is a need for balance & compromise in a democracy.
7. define a constructive role for themselves in a variety of settings including college, community, professional organizations, and a democratic society.

Academic Outcome Area: Awareness and Appreciation of Human Culture

Demonstrate the skills and attitudes needed to understand the aspirations, achievements, and expressions of all human beings.

Competencies:

Successful students should be able to:

1. acknowledge cultural, gender, and intellectual diversity.
2. recognize ideas and aspirations that are common to many cultures.
3. engage in an informed discussion of questions regarding personal, professional, social, and global issues.
4. critically respond to artistic works in terms of their formal elements and historical context.
5. identify ways artistic works reflect personal and collective views of what it means to be human.

By Invitation Only: The HCC Capstone Course

«name» is cordially invited to register for Highland Community College's exclusive... interactive... first-of-its-kind... Capstone Course.

This is a remarkably unique opportunity for you, as a second semester sophomore, since this course is usually reserved for the final year at a senior institution. A Capstone Course is designed to be the culmination, or the capstone, of your higher education experience at HCC. During this course students will:

- *Integrate and apply knowledge and skills from general education curriculum*
- *Design and evaluate projects that demonstrate critical thinking*
- *Focus on knowledge and values that lead to personal and professional success*
- *Explore personal, social and practical issues of transition to a senior institution or an employment environment*

This unique opportunity is open, by invitation, to the first 60 students who register. This tuition-free course is worth 2-credit hours; but, at the completion of this 8-week course, you will receive a 3-credit hour scholarship. The scholarship may be retroactively applied to the spring 1999's tuition.

This course will be an impressive addition to your transcripts and resume. An individualized portfolio will be created during this course, and will be a notable addition when transferring to a university or pursuing employment.

Three sections are scheduled to meet from January 11 through March 5.

The sections are:	*Monday & Wednesday:*	*11:00 - 12:30*
	Monday & Wednesday:	*2:00 - 3:30*
	Tuesday & Thursday:	*11:00 - 12:30*

We urge you to register for this unquestionably worthwhile academic experience by taking this letter to the Office of Admissions and Records or your Academic Advisor. Don't put off registering -- remember, space is limited to 60 students.

For additional information about the Capstone Course, contact: *Vicki Jensen, ext. 330*
Alan Nowicki, ext. 261
Alan Wenzel, ext. 263
Jeff Davidson, ext. 233

COURSE SYLLABUS

HIGHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
2998 W. PEARL CITY RD.
FREEPORT, IL 61032

DATE: Spring 2000
Semester Year

Instructors:

Course Prefix and Number: LIB 299 Capstone Section:

Credit Hours: 2 Lecture Hours: 2 Lab Hours: 0

Course Repeatable: Yes_ No X How many times:

Prerequisites: By invitation to students completing between 25 and 40 general education credits from across the curriculum.

Catalog Description: The course provides students with the opportunity to integrate and apply knowledge and skills from their general education curriculum. Students will design and evaluate projects which demonstrate critical thinking and which focus on the knowledge and values leading to personal and professional success. The course will provide students with an opportunity to explore the personal, social, and practical issues of transition to a senior institution or a work environment.

Text and Supplemental Materials Used: Instructor prepared materials. Selected readings.

Course Outcomes:

I. The student will demonstrate the extent to which he/she can engage in an informed discussion of personal, professional, social and global issues.

Competencies:

Gather, analyze, and synthesize data from a variety of resources which are clearly documented or cited.

Make oral presentations using correct pronunciation and grammar and the appropriate organization and style.

II. The student will demonstrate the extent to which he/ she can design, communicate and evaluate individual and/or collaborative projects/learning outcomes.

Competencies:

Communicate effectively using appropriate rhetorical patterns.

Provide sufficient and ample detail in support of ideas.

Communicate numerical information by constructing mathematical models such as tables and graphs.

Critique his/her own written and oral presentations and make revisions to improve them.

III. The student will demonstrate the extent to which he/she can develop strategies to deal with expectations for independent decision-making, transfer, and the world of work.

Competencies:

Show industry, punctuality, self-discipline, and fairness.

Demonstrate a willingness to apply effective interpersonal and intergroup behaviors.

Demonstrate a problem–solving process in response to course assignments and expectations.

Method of Instruction: Students will create individual and collaborative projects in response to films, fiction, and other assigned reading. Instructors will mentor and guide students on project work.

Method of Evaluation: Student projects will be evaluated according to established rubrics.

What's a project?

Analyzes for
- big issues
- bigger issues
- problem/solution issues
- argument—pro/con issues
- conflicts

Poses
- a clarification of the issues
- a solution to a problem
- a position pro or con which is supported

Gathers additional information
- answers to specific questions
- background information
- different points of view
- the significance of events and/or individual roles

Presents issues and/or information to an audience
- new knowledge is organized
- multiple sources are synthesized
- inferences are drawn

Includes self-assessment along the way
- shape and content of final product are determined
- final product is revised and improved at several points